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THE LEVEL OF UTM TESL TEACHER TRAINEES’ PERCEPTION ON PRACTICAL TEACHING

JOLENE P’NG CHOON LIN

A report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Science with Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
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APRIL 2010
“I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and in my opinion this thesis is sufficient in terms of scope and quality for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Science with Education (TESL)”

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Name : Jolene P’ng Choon Lin
Date : 16th April 2010
To my dearest mum and dad,

thank you for all your love and support
I would like to express my deepest appreciation to many individuals for helping me to produce this piece of work. First of all, it has been a great honor for me to work with my ever inspiring supervisor, Dr. Azizah Rajab. Without her guidance, support and also advice, this report would not have been the same as presented here. I would like to say a big thank you to her for guiding me from start to finish and ensuring that my work reached perfection. I have gained lots of knowledge and considerable insights while working under her supervision.

Besides that, my special thanks also go to all my course mates, the third and fourth year TESL students who have been supportive respondents of this research. By contributing their experiences, advices and useful recommendations have helped to construct this study.

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduates of the Faculty of Education from Universiti Teknologi Malaysia have to undergo practical teaching in schools in order to graduate. The purpose of practical teaching is to expose and let them gain more teaching experience in a real classroom situation with the guidance of a supervisor. This research study is to investigate the level of perception in terms of subject competence, subject knowledge and the teaching skills of TESL teacher trainees. All together there were 60 respondents, 30 from third year and 30 from fourth year TESL students. Data was collected from the feedback given by the respondents through a set of questionnaire which is adapted from Shereena Sreetharam (2008) and the data obtained is analyzed by SPSS version 16.0 software for windows (Statistical Package for Social Science program). The results of this research proved that the level of perception from the aspects of subject competence, subject knowledge and teaching skills are high. TESL teacher trainees have good language proficiency and deep understanding of the subject knowledge as well as adequate teaching skills for their practical teaching. Although result shows that they are ready to teach, majority of them think that they are not fully prepared to teach yet. Most of them felt nervous, scared and stressful before undergoing practical teaching. These might be due to the lack of confidence in teaching. As a result, teacher trainees need more practice to gain more experience and confidence in teaching.
ABSTRAK

Sarjana Fakulti Pendidikan dari Universiti Teknologi Malaysia perlu menjalani latihan mengajar di sekolah untuk lulus. Tujuan latihan mengajar adalah untuk mendedah dan memberi guru pelatih lebih pengalaman mengajar di kelas yang sebenar dengan bimbingan seorang penyelia. Kajian ini mengkaji tahap persepsi guru pelatih TESL berdasarkan kecekapan subjek, pengetahuan subjek dan kemahiran mengajar. Dari keseluruhannya, terdapat 60 responden, 30 dari tahun ketiga dan 30 dari tahun keempat pelajar TESL. Data dikumpul dengan maklum balas yang diperolehi dari soal selidik yang dijawab oleh semua responden, seterusnya ia dianalisis dengan menggunakan SPSS 16.0 (Statistical Package for Social Science program). Keputusan kajian ini membuktikan bahawa tahap persepsi guru pelatih dari aspek kecekapan subjek, pengetahuan subjek dan kemahiran mengajar adalah tinggi. Guru pelatih TESL mempunyai kecekapan bahasa, kefahaman pengetahuan subjek dan kemahiran mengajar semasa latihan mengajar. Walaupun keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa mereka telah bersedia mengajar, majoriti daripada mereka mengatakan bahawa mereka tidak sedia untuk mengajar sepenuhnya. Kebanyakan mereka berasa resah, takut dan stres sebelum menjalani latihan mengajar. Ini mungkin disebabkan oleh kurang keyakinan dalam mengajar. Oleh demikian, guru pelatih perlu lebih latihan untuk menambahkan pengalaman dan keyakinan diri sebelum mengajar.
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1.0 Introduction

According to Arends, Winitzky and Tannenbaum (1998), education is a need to all children because it prepares children to live together in a complicated society and to provide them with social and academic skills for them to solve some of the problems that they might face in future. They also mentioned that they want a flexible curriculum which is constantly changing based on the ongoing changes in the real world. However, teacher plays an important role to facilitate students’ progress in understanding and adapting to those changes.

Based on thinkexist.com Bill Gates once said that: ‘Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together and motivating them, the teacher is the most important.’ Nowadays, we cannot live without technology in our lives. Some technology like computers, podcasting, internet, and so on can even guide and teach children. But after all they are just lifeless tools which have limited ability and gives only restricted feedback. Therefore, teacher plays a very
important role in our country’s education system. They are the ones that will be teaching and educating our future generations. Teachers could also give a big impact and influence on their students for a lifetime.

Lawrence (1999) stated that a teacher with high self-esteem is willing to be flexible, emotionally mature, cheerful and optimistic. They also have the ability to personalise teaching. Other than that, Abdul Raof and Subahan (1991) believe that a teacher has to comprehend the basic of education by focusing on a particular subject area, mastery of academic lesson content, the usage of pedagogic principles and professionalism needed. Based on these three education expert, we can conclude that the level of readiness can be evaluated from three aspects which are skills, knowledge and professionalism.

A teacher should also have the enthusiasm on the subject matter to be a competent teacher. They should have the ability to show interest in the teaching process too. It is crucial for a teacher to show interaction in the teaching and learning process as it will influence the students’ level of motivation during the learning process.

According to Arends (2007), teaching is an art based on teachers’ experiences and the wisdom of practice; it cannot be guided by scientific knowledge alone. Chitravelu (2005) mentioned that a teacher requires practice in using the skills involved in teaching before teaching in the real classroom context. A good teacher with good teaching skills should be able to demonstrate and practice various teaching skills and behaviours (refer to 2.4 and 2.5).
In brief, it is important for teacher trainees to be exposed to the real teaching world where they will be able to apply their knowledge (refer to 2.2). Due to the fact that teachers play a significant role in education, we need to provide adequate and effective ways to train our current teachers to be better and to produce more professional future teachers. According to Murphy (2003), practical teaching is a central component in the teacher’s education programmes. Practical teaching will be the time where teacher trainees will get to work with experienced teachers. This will be a crucial step for those teacher trainees in learning to be an effective teacher. It is also the time for them to put into practice the theories that they have learned in their course. In conclusion, teacher trainees will be able to apply their subject knowledge and subject competence while undergoing their practical teaching.

1.1 Background of problem

Nowadays, children being educated in schools are very common yet necessary to everyone. During my grandparents’ time that was around the 30’s, it is a very rare opportunity for children to be able to go to school. In an average family, they usually can only afford to let their eldest son to receive education because when they grow up, they will have the responsibility to take care of their family and their family would have to be fully dependent on them. However, now our lifestyle and environments has been improving continuously from time to time, education has becoming the focus. Everyone needs education in order to be knowledgeable, mature and successful in this world. With good education, people will be able to widen and opened their thinking and improve their current lifestyle and environment. Therefore, many schools and universities are improvising and education has become an essential need to everyone in the world.
Teachers are the torchbearer and the main role model of the school. According to Nikolic and Cabaj (2000), teachers could play a number of different roles such as an educator, decision maker, counsellor, motivator, facilitator, diagnostician, actor, and so on. It all depends on their perceptions, methodology and preferences and also how they want to deliver their lesson.

Kennedy (1990) stated that a good teacher should show that he/she is the master of the subject, exhibit passion for their field and creates a positive environment for learning. It is very important for the teacher to know the subject and be knowledgeable in the subject area. The teacher must have the ability to demonstrate comprehensible knowledge of the subject. A good teacher must also know the field of specialization very well to make the subject interesting and attract students’ attention to learn. Therefore, a teacher needs to be really dedicated and enthusiastic in their job, have lots of patience and flexibility towards their students in order to be a good teacher (refer to 2.4).

According to Kennedy (1990), he also believes that a good teacher needs to understand subject matter deeply and flexibly so that they will be able to help students create useful cognitive maps, relate one idea to another and address misconceptions. Teachers must also see how ideas are connected across fields and with everyday life. The deep understanding of the subject matter will provide a foundation of content knowledge which will enable the teachers to make ideas accessible to others. Hence, teacher trainees need to gain lots of experience in teaching so that they are able to teach or help their students based on their level of proficiency and their needs (refer to 2.5).
As education becomes more and more important, the number of schools has been increasing and the demand for teachers is escalating too. Many people are interested in being a teacher, but this could not determine that they will be a good teacher yet. This is because they do not have any experience and in order to be a good teacher, one needs to have lots of experience. Therefore, Faculty of Education in many universities have a compulsory course which is the practical teaching for all future teachers. The purpose for this is to expose teacher trainees to the real world of teaching and also to gain some teaching experience. As most of the teacher trainees do not have any teaching experience, they might need to do a lot of preparation compare to those who have. They have to try implementing whatever theories they have learned and the skills that they are comfortable and familiar with in their lessons. Besides that, they should also observe their students to see which level of language proficiency are they in and what are the best ways to attract their attention and to control the whole class before they start teaching them. Usually teacher trainees will face problems like classroom management, varieties of teaching skills and subject competence due to the lack of experience in teaching.

However, Abdul Raof and Subahan (1991) established that the attitudes of teacher trainees also contribute to the “making and breaking” of a teacher trainee; such as:

a) Certain teacher trainees are teaching without following the syllabus that has been prepared by the Department of State Education;
b) They do not care much on students’ disciplines;
c) They do not want to discuss with the teacher in charge of that particular subject;
d) They prefer to talk about it with their respective supervisor rather than their peers.

Practical teaching carries a very high credit for those teacher trainees and their aims is to score well for this by preparing creative and interesting lessons. In order to do so, they used many different sources other than the text book to gain ideas for their lessons such as reference book, workbook, software, and internet. Inexperience
teacher trainees spend a lot of time planning their lessons, preparing teaching aids and even creating their own materials. Therefore, they might neglect their students’ disciplines and focus on their teaching only. Some teacher trainees have problem adapting themselves in a new environment in school. Thus, when they faced problems in their teaching, they do not have to courage to seek help from other teachers other than their own respective supervisors. Actually, by interacting with experienced teachers in school will help teacher trainees a lot especially communicating with those specialised teacher of our field of studies.

Apparently, having the right attitude, self-readiness, interest, subject competence and the right teaching skills and methodology would definitely help teacher trainees in performing their duties well, effectively and successfully.

1.2 Statement of problem

According to Abdul Raof and Subahan (1991) again, the examples of negative attitudes of the teacher trainees are those who are not teaching according to the syllabus provided by State Education Department. Besides that, they also do not pay much attention on the students’ disciplinary problems in class and just concentrate on their own teaching which caused bad classroom management and students are unable to learn effectively. Moreover, teacher trainees are lack of sufficient teaching skills in performing practical teaching. This shows that most teacher trainees are not ready to join the real world of teaching. They need more effective training before undergoing practical teaching so that they will be ready to perform well for their training.
Undergraduates who are taking this TESL programme have to undergo practical teaching in order to graduate. However, not all teacher trainees are prepared to teach at school as some of them do not show interest and good attitude in performing practical teaching. In addition, many teacher trainees who have undergone their practical teaching only realised that they are not well prepared in terms of subject knowledge and subject competence. They are unable to deliver their lesson effectively because they do not have a flexible understanding of subject matter. Moreover, trainees are not able to anticipate and respond to typical student patterns of understanding and misunderstanding within a content area (Hammond, 2005).

New teacher trainees who have never been exposed to the real world of teaching will definitely face lots of difficulties in their practical teaching. They usually encounter many problems due to their first time experiencing teaching. They have to be well prepared mentally, emotionally and also physically in order to teach a group of students with different needs. The most common problem they face is regarding subject knowledge, subject competence and teaching skills. According to Aziz Nordin (2005), teacher trainees have problems such as not having enough preparation in terms of:

a) Academic content and self-readiness;
b) Not being mature in professional skills;
c) Lack of instruction and guidance from senior teacher;
d) Never been exposed to the real situation such as the environment of schools.

Undergraduates from the Faculty of Education have to undergo for their practical teaching in their third year of their four years course in order to graduate. The main objective is to prepare the teacher trainees to teach in schools and to give them an exposure about the teaching profession and the
responsibilities of being a teacher. Most importantly, is to give a chance for teacher trainees to practice all the theories and teaching methodologies that they have learned in the real classroom. Moreover, practical teaching also functions as a guide and it evaluates the teacher trainees’ capability in performing duties as a teacher. This process could also help to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the teacher trainee’s teaching capability with the guidance and evaluation of their supervisors. Teacher trainees would not be able to learn all this by being spoon fed by their supervisors. They need to learn them authentically and experience it themselves. As an old saying goes, “If you give a person a fish, you feed them for a day. But if you teach a person to fish, you feed them for a lifetime.”

1.3 Objectives of study

It is hoped that through this study, the researcher would be able to:

a) determine the level of perception in terms of subject competence among teacher trainees in performing practical teaching
b) establish the level of perception in terms of subject knowledge among teacher trainees in performing practical teaching.
c) identify the teacher trainees’ level of perception in terms of teaching skill before undergoing practical teaching.